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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to: (1) identify why there are so few minority teacher candidates; (2) identify factors which tend to influence the academic success of minority preservice teachers; (3) identify factors under the control of teacher educators which may increase minority retention; and (4) make recommendations to facilitate change in teacher preparation programs with minority candidates. The following factors are identified: undereducation of minority children and youth in elementary and secondary schools; the increasing use of competency tests at the beginning or end of teacher education programs; inequity in teacher education programs--biased curriculum materials and unbalanced program content; ineffective teaching by university professors; different cultural backgrounds and learning styles; and the need for instruction.to be delivered in cross-racial and cross-ethnic settings. Based on an understanding of these factors, recommendations for teacher educators are made. Teacher educators must: learn classroom skills for effective multicultural instruction; work with liberal arts faculty to enhance student achievement; encourage the development of bicultural teaching skills in minority students; assess and address the perceived needs of minority teacher candidates; and develop and display cognitive competencies for multicultural education. (JD)

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Classroom Skills for Effective Minority Teacher Education

NOTES

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Classroom Skills for Effective Minority Teacher Education

As the number of minority students in American classrooms increases and the number of minority teachers decreases, much attention in teacher education has focused on minority teacher candidates. In this new age of teacher education, efforts must be made inside the teacher education classroom to retain minority students and to increase the success of minority students in completing credential programs.

The Need for Minority Teachers

The need for minority teachers has been summarized by Spellman (1988) and others. Generally it is predicted that the percentage of minority teachers in the workforce, which was 12% in 1988, will be reduced by half by 2000. This shortage is primarily an urban plight. In 1986, the 32 largest school districts reported that 75% of their students were minorities, mainly Blacks. The issue of minority teachers goes beyond the question of if only minority teachers should teach minority students. Rather, the issue is that all children in American schools need the opportunity to experience a realistic representation of the demographics of the country among the teachers who socialize and educate them (Haberman, 1988).

According to Henninger (1989), efforts to recruit and retain minority teacher education candidates focus on four areas: providing financial assistance; changing attitudes toward teaching as a career; recruiting minority freshmen, and targeting students with previous college experience. Although these efforts are important, they do not address the academic or classroom-related factors which impact minority students in teacher preparation programs. That is, these factors are external to the classroom and factors over which we, as teacher educators, have little control. This paper seeks to: 1) identify why there are so few minority

teacher candidates, 2) identify factors which tend to influence the academic success of minority preservice teachers, 3) identify factors which are under the control of teacher educators which may increase minority retention, and 4) make recommendations to facilitate change in teacher preparation programs with minority teacher candidates.

One important caveat is noted. It is recognized that the factors which are identified in this paper as related to academic success among preservice teachers hold true for the range of students in our classrooms, not just minority students. But although these factors are important to the learning of many of our preservice teachers, they are essential for the academic success of minority students, especially first- and first-and-a-half generation Americans. Although these learning characteristics are represented across the student population, they most strongly characterize minority learners.

The Dearth of Minority Teaching Candidates

Historically, academic success and retention of minority students has been attributed to deficits in the students themselves or in their family backgrounds. Research conducted during the past fifteen years has consistently suggested a variety of factors that influence academic success in minority students (Astin, 1982; Tinto, 1982). The factors most often cited can be categorized as: prior educational background and achievement, environmental and familial support, level of student motivation and commitment, teacher expectations of student achievement, and institutional environment (Berube, 1984).

Increasingly, however, school-related variables are seen as the root of the phenomena. These variables include the fact that American schools reflect learning theory of Anglo-Europeans with respect to cognitive functioning, learning, and achievement and that teachers foster academic

failure in minority students by not teaching effectively (Anderson, 1988; Burstein & Cabello, 1989).

With respect to teacher education, four factors are evident in the literature which contribute to the dearth of minority teacher candidates. First, too few minority teaching candidates is one manifestation of the undereducation of minority children and youth in elementary and secondary schools (Haberman, 1988). As a result, proportionately fewer minority students seek higher education and those who do persist at a disproportionately lower rate than Anglo students once they go beyond a two-year program. Many minority students are talented yet simply underprepared for university programs, especially when they must compete against their better educated, more affluent classmates. The situation is further aggravated when minority students work parttime or fulltime and therefore proceed through their coursework in a parttime, erratic manner. Coursework and career decisions are often based on the amount of time involved rather than on preference or ability. Finally, they become discouraged with the lack of relationship between hard work and good grades, and many drop out of their programs without degrees (Hernandez & Descamps, 1986).

Second, the increasing use of competency tests at the beginning or end of teacher education programs is a significant factor in decreasing the number of minority teaching candidates (Spellman, 1988). It seems that strong assistance programs, including summer programs, counseling, and coaching, may be needed to encourage successful completion of the teacher education program by minority candidates (Haberman, 1988; Hernandez & Descamps, 1986).

A third factor which explains the dearth of minority teacher candidates is the inequity in teacher education programs. Minority

candidates are faced with an overwhelming task during the preservice training program: they are expected to be bicultural, bidialectic, and bicognitive in order to succeed in their classes and field experiences. Bicultural teaching and learning occur when the teacher and student have different racial or ethnic identities (Boyer, 1983). Wehrly (1988) found that many minority students feel that they must give up their cultural identify in order to succeed in contemporary institutions of higher education. Indeed, most Anglo students move from home through college and to their teaching jobs on familiar cultural and cognitive grounds. Minority candidates, however, must learn to learn and to teach in situations and using methods which may be foreign to their culture.

Further inequity is evident in biased curriculum materials and unbalanced program content. This inequity leads some minority students to view their preparation as irrelevant or offensive. For example, Thuy (1981) noted that the emphasis in American education on independent work and independent thinking collides with the Indochinese regard for conformity and collective behavior. If an Asian-American preservice teacher develops and learns to encourage independence in her students, it sets up conflict with the traditional Asian-American community and widens the generation gap within the family. Minority teacher candidates, then, must devote considerable capacity and energy to develop and maintain a bicultural orientation throughout their preparation program in order to succeed, which may underscore their ability to achieve academically (Anderson, 1988).

The fourth factor identified in the literature and related to limited number of minority teacher candidates is ineffective teaching by university professors. Brown (1986) argues that this does not mean that "poor" teaching is being practiced, but rather that classroom teaching is often

"ineffective" in impacting certain groups, particularly in multicultural classrooms. Wilson (in Anderson, 1988) explained that the socialization process transmits "coreographed patterns of behavior" that a person learns to copy in order to participate in the cultural group. Relatedly, the socialization process predisposes an individual to approach learning experiences in culture-specific ways. That is, different cultures produce different learning styles. Herskovitz (1958) contended that the characteristics of the parent culture, such as learning style, persist in minority sub-groups even though additional behaviors are borrowed from the dominant culture. Among African-Americans, for example, behavioral and cultural style survive because of institutions such as the Black church and Black family; the cultural style in the sub-group of African-Americans is encapsulated within its own culture to prevent total assimilation into the dominant Anglo culture.

The basis for and persistence of disparate learning styles among minority students was discussed by Anderson (1988). Research suggests, for example, that Mexican-American and Mexican students are more strongly motivated by cooperation than are Anglo-American children, and have higher needs for affiliation and succorance (need to be comforted) while Anglos demonstrated stronger needs for achievement. Further, Mexican-American students tended to be field-dependent and do best in verbal tasks, to learn materials more easily which contained humor and social content. They were sensitive to the opinion of others, and this impacted their learning. Conversely, Anglo-American students did best on analytic tasks and learned material that was inanimate and impersonal more easily. Their academic performance was not greatly impacted by the opinion of others (Cohen, 1969; Messick, 1970; & Rameriz, 1973 in Anderson, 1988).

According to Boyer (1983), the extent to which a professor's

instructional behavior responds to alternative learning styles in the classroom will dictate the progress or success of minority learners in almost all instances. A great need exists, then, for proficiency in identifying one's own instructional style and adapting that style in order to effectively deliver instruction in cross-racial, cross-ethnic settings if minority teaching candidates are to be encouraged.

Preparing and Retaining Minority Teacher Candidates

The preceding four factors help to explain why there is a shortage of minority teacher education students. Based on an understanding of those factors, recommendations for teacher educators and teacher education programs can be made.

1. Teacher educators must learn classroom skills for effective multicultural instruction.

Although many researchers have tried to determine the characteristics of effective instruction in elementary and secondary schools, few have attended to post-secondary education or to education in multicultural settings. Jenkins and Bainer (1990) reported specific instructional behaviors shown to be effective in linguistically and culturally diverse college classrooms. Guskey and Easton (1983) found that post-secondary instructors who were effective in culturally diverse classrooms shared few personal characteristics but displayed many common teaching characteristics and instructional practices. Effective instructors were very organized, systematic, and consistent in their teaching. They presented detailed outlines of the entire course, clear course objectives, and absolute standards for evaluating student learning and assigning grades at the beginning of the course, yet demonstrated flexibility when it was important. Effective instructors stressed that they had confidence in the students' abilities, and presented lessons that had clear direction yet were

flexible enough to allow student discussion. Student participation was solicited as effective instructors frequently stopped to check for student understanding and show the relevance of the topic to the students' overall programs, career goals, and lives. Effective multicultural instructors provided regular, specific feedback to students and stressed the importance of recognizing students for improvement as well as success.

Effective multicultural instructors also demonstrated a sense of "humanness" (Guskey & Easton, 1983; Scollon, 1981). Instructors displayed positive, personal regard for students and, throughout the course, shared personal information with the students. Scollon (1981) found that, in cross-cultural situations, students want and involved and interested teacher, and that teacher-student and student-teacher interactions for professional reasons were linked to the student's academic growth.

It is important to note that adjusting teaching style does not mean compromising academic standards. As Starr (1986) pointed out, the fact that one is a minority cannot be an excuse for sub-standard performance. Adjusting one's teaching style merely makes learning more accessible to students whose learning styles differ from that of the instructor. It helps minority students acquire comparable skills but through a different path (Hernandez & Descamps, 1986).

2. Teacher educators must work with liberal arts faculty to enhance student achievement.

According to Anderson (1988), one of the most critical problems minorities face with secondary and post-secondary education is that the faculty are not equipped to identify, interpret, and respond to variant learning styles in multicultural populations. The resulting communication gap between the teacher's and students' indigenous learning styles is most apparent in abstract, theoretical courses such as mathematics and the hard

sciences. A problem results for many minority students because teaching theory takes precedence over practical application and direct experience; an approach that coincides with the Anglo-European cognitive style. As a result, minority students lose interest early in the course and do poorly. This is increasingly a problem for minority teaching candidates because of the competencies required in these courses and measured on standardized tests. If students do poorly in mathematics and the hard sciences, their chances of passing standardized tests is reduced. Also, if they develop negative attitudes toward mathematics and science, these notions are perpetuated through their teaching, thus compounding the already dismal level of science and math achievement in America's children and youth.

Teacher educators must work with faculty members in core courses toward modifying their teaching styles and the approach in their courses in order to encourage minority student achievement. This may not be easy for, as Sandfur (1987) noted, many faculty members resist changes in their teaching in spite of the lack of learning going on in their classrooms. Sandfur explained that mathematics professors were enamored with the abstractions of their discipline and felt that changing to a more practical approach in class would "defile their art". More important, Sandfur attributed the lack of change to an interaction of laziness and fear of the increasing and little understood minority enrollment in their courses.

Hernandez and Descamps (1986) provided an example of changes that Mexican-America students need if they are to succeed in mathematics courses. The students they studied needed small math classes (20-25 students) which were highly structured and had specific course objectives and assignment dates presented at the beginning of the course. Continuous feedback on their progress was also important, as were opportunities to apply math to other areas of the curriculum and work in problem solving.

Some of these factors essential to minority achievement may be realized by allowing a teacher educator to co-teach with the content area specialist, providing age-specific applications and methods for the theory and content in a weekly seminar. Others (Haberman, 1988; Spellman, 1988) suggested coaching to help minority students pass standardized tests especially in these weak areas. This band aid approach is less desirable, however, because it unfairly places the responsibility to compensate for ineffective instruction on the minority student who may already be frustrated over repeated failure in these content areas.

3. Teacher educators must encourage the development of bicultural teaching skills in minority students through focused field and clinical experiences.

In order to be effective, teachers must intimately understand the culture of their students. Because many minority students are isolated from the majority culture they have experienced minimal acculturation to the majority culture or to the culture of American schooling. The greater the acculturation gap, the more problems the minority teacher candidate will experience in classroom settings. Anderson (1988) pointed out the importance of understanding the acculturation gap as a factor limiting minority academic success. In the Korean-American community, for example, Kim (1981) noted that Korean-Americans are still culturally predominately Korean, especially with respect to language preference. Although students were generally fluent in both Korean and English, the home environment was primarily Korean no matter how well acculturated the parents were: meals, cultural values, behavioral expectations, norms of governing family interactions, and mediums of communication all preserved the Korean culture. This, of course, is essential to maintaining a cultural identify. But after observing the community, Kim (1981) also found

that there was a strong desire for biculturality but no real sense of how to achieve it or of the problems it entails. In most cases, Kim concluded that achievement of biculturality has to be managed through conscious choice and that it will not come on its own.

These acculturation problems are compounded by the unusual stresses suffered by many Korean-American students attempting to adapt to Anglo-American classrooms. When they were students, Korean-Americans preservice teachers generally displayed traditional Korean values and behaved in school: being obedient and respectful toward adults and adopting a generally passive stance toward the learning experience. Expecting a similar response now that they beginning to teach in American classrooms, the minority preservice teachers experience tremendous stress when the students do not meet their culture-bound expectations of behavior, even in the context of learning when children are expected to ask questions, speak out, and initiate communication with the teacher. Because academic learning and achievement is highly valued in the Korean culture, they do not know how to handle or even understand students who are unmotivated or discipline problems.

Kim (1981) suggested that minority students who experience an acculturation gap need academic help and counseling to develop realistic expectations, goals, and support systems. This is especially essential to minority teacher candidates who must understand the culture of American classrooms before they can teach effectively in them. This acculturation to the school context can be achieved through structured field and clinical experiences after which preservice teachers are forced to reflect on those experiences in order to develop new understandings, new ideas, and new skills in cross-cultural communication (Cushner & Brislin, 1986). The experiences should include interactions with parents, staff, administrators,

and support personnel as well as teachers and students. Debriefing from these field experiences should focus on comparing and contrasting the familiar and unfamiliar classroom settings and discussing the "mild culture shock" which is a valuable impetus for learning.

Finally, in conjunction with the field experiences preservice teachers should be led to consider the human service delivery role of teaching (Boyer, 1983). That is, those who choose professions such as social work, medicine, and teaching are expected to commit to serve people of all races, colors, and creeds. Preservice teachers of the minority and majority cultures need to examine their career motives with respect to this human service commitment. Typically, education graduates seem to envision themselves as returning to schools they know. Are they willing to teach anywhere, or only where a particular population of students exists? Boyer (1983) suggests that such assessment involves reviewing one's personal life experiences with racially and ethnically different individuals, one's values and attitudes toward different ethnic and cultural groups, and willingness to establish skills to work effectively in variant classroom settings.

4. Teacher educators need to assess and address the perceived needs of minority teacher candidates in the teacher preparation program.

Minority student underachievement has been linked to their lack of input and impact on defining the curriculum under study (Haughton, 1986) and to perceptions of inequitable treatment (Haberman, 1988). It is noted that equitable treatment does not mean equal treatment, but rather individualization and recognizing differing student needs (Banks, 1983; Haberman, 1988). With respect to teacher education, the concern for quality should encourage teacher educators to differentiate among preservice teachers in order to ensure that essential teaching skills and competencies are achieved. As Finley (1983) noted when evaluating the limited success of

cross-cultural education, teachers may individualize instruction without meeting individual needs because the school and students hold different perceptions of what those needs are. This indicates that it is essential for teacher educators to assess the perceived needs of minority preservice teachers, especially since most preservice education programs were developed with the needs of Anglo-American preservice teachers in mind.

5. Teacher educators must develop and display cognitive competencies for multicultural education.

Beyond the pedagogical skills essential to effective teaching in multicultural classrooms, teacher educators must identify and develop cognitive competencies or mindsets vital to multicultural instruction. Baptiste and Baptiste (1979) identified eleven values and attitudes essential to working with minority students. Anderson (1988) pointed out that until educators develop a different set of understandings about the way diverse populations communicate, behave, and think we are merely providing lip service to egalitarian values and the goal of preparing more minority teachers.

According to Cushner and Brislin (1986), teacher educators have a dual responsibility. First, we must learn to interact with and effectively teach culturally different preservice teachers within our classrooms, encouraging and facilitating their progress toward a teaching credential and successful teaching career. Second, we must prepare those preservice teachers for the interdependent world and classrooms which they will confront by transmitting our pedagogical and cognitive competencies to them.

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